

5.7 RECOVERY AND RECONSTRUCTION

Need for Recovery Planning: After major disasters around the world, local governments have been beset with pressures to act quickly to put their communities back together and restore normalcy. Businesses and governments alike are generally unprepared to deal efficiently and wisely with the flood of decisions about how best to recover and reconstruct. Poor timing of disaster assistance leads to failure of businesses that might otherwise survive. Buildings are rebuilt in an unsafe way or in hazardous locations so that similar destruction is likely to reoccur.

Hard experience from recent California earthquakes has demonstrated the importance of preparing in advance of disaster for actions taken after. Local government has a major responsibility to prepare in advance to handle community recovery efficiently and wisely. Delays and confusion are caused by competing priorities for action and resources and can be diminished by planning. Management systems and policies must confront pre-event hazard mitigation as well as post-event short-term recovery and long-term reconstruction actions.

5.7.1 The Safety Element and Recovery Planning

As a comprehensive policy framework for community hazard reduction, the Safety Element provides an ideal foundation for pursuing recovery and reconstruction issues. Pre-event mitigation of structural and natural hazards directly reduces post-event expenditure of human and financial resources for emergency response, and then recovery and reconstruction. The State's General Plan Guidelines encourage local governments to include "contingency plans for immediate post-earthquake response and longer term reconstruction activities in areas potentially subject to significant damage." Moreover, incorporation of disaster recovery and reconstruction policies in local Safety Elements can help communities to see their critical importance.

It is necessary to face the reality that all known hazards will not be fully mitigated by the time disaster strikes. To the extent that a County has prepared itself to deal with the sudden onslaught of emergency, recovery and reconstruction requirements,, it will be in a good position to facilitate restoration of normalcy. All levels and departments of County government must be willing to look beyond the more familiar emergency response functions to the less well-known recovery and rebuilding issues. There will probably be a need for staff guidance and training.

A Safety Element cannot fully equip a community to perform well in recovery from a real disaster. That requires more in-depth planning and a comprehensive study of real disaster recovery experiences, worldwide. A Safety Element can set the stage and